

## Why is NRIS part of the Montana State Library?

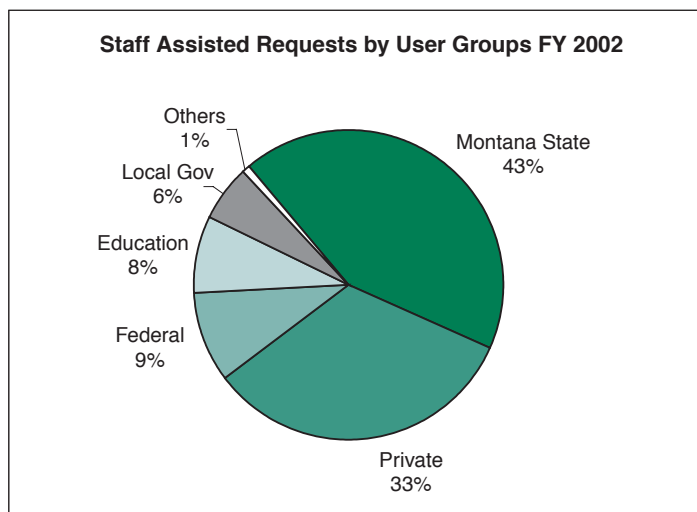
The Montana State Library houses the NRIS program for two reasons: the State Library is a non-regulatory agency that provides unbiased information, and the State Library has the mission of, and expertise in, providing access to information.

The fact that NRIS has been placed in a neutral agency encourages broad use of the system by all state agencies as well as Montana businesses and citizens. NRIS provides a broad range of services to agencies to ensure that users can access NRIS products and services as easily as they might if NRIS were a program of the user's agency.

NRIS' location in the state library also allows NRIS to concentrate on its mission of disseminating information, freeing the various agencies that utilize NRIS to concentrate on fulfilling their respective agency mandates without having to spend resources to disseminate data to other agencies or the public.

## Who uses NRIS, and how?

In order to ensure that Montana's natural resource information is available to the widest possible audience, NRIS provides access to its information holdings in a variety of ways. Most of the information in the NRIS clearinghouse is made available via the Internet; however, staff assistance in locating and obtaining information is also available, and much of the information assimilated by our Natural Heritage Program is available through published reports.

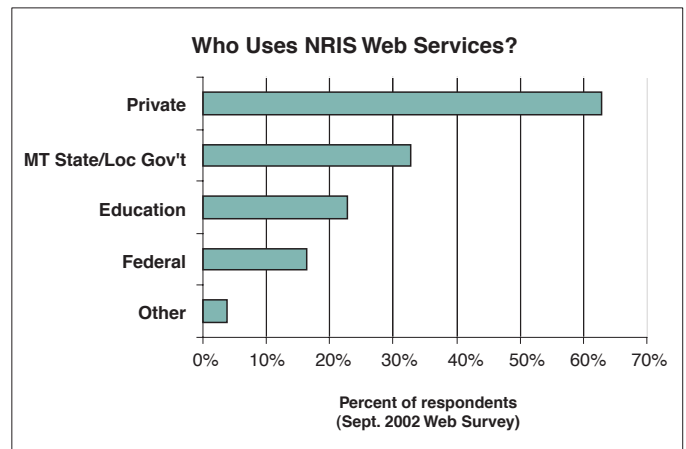


Users of NRIS' Internet-based services range from computer novices to information technology professionals, and NRIS provides information in ways that can be used by persons at both ends of the spectrum. For the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) professional, hundreds of geospatial data themes are available for download. For the technically savvy computer user, many of these same themes can be viewed on-line, along with reports summarizing related information. For novice computer users, a series of pre-formatted maps are available.

An NRIS user survey was conducted on the NRIS website throughout the month of September, 2002, to help NRIS improve its services. We learned:

- Over 63% of respondents were from the private sector.
- Over 60% of respondents visit the NRIS website at least several times per month.
- 80% said NRIS services were valuable or essential to their business, agency, or personal needs.

Over one-third of respondents use NRIS information for planning; and another third for resource management. More than half download geographic information system (GIS) data, such as stream and road information, to use in their own projects and analyses. Over half also use the NRIS TopoFinder, which allows people to view topographic maps on-line. The NRIS Water Information System is consulted by over one-third of survey respondents.



NRIS responds to thousands of inquiries each month via its website. Over one-third of the survey respondents visit the site each day or several times per week. **During the month of November, 2002, NRIS' web pages received over 51,000 visitors, who used the NRIS website for an average of 13 minutes each. That translates to 384 person-hours each day spent on the NRIS site.**

Visit [nris.state.mt.us](http://nris.state.mt.us) to view complete survey results.

# Communication

NRIS utilizes a variety of avenues to reach our partners and the public:

- **Monthly seminars** – NRIS sponsors a monthly seminar series to offer interested individuals an opportunity to discuss advances in technology, improvements in information access and use, and other related topics.
- **Workshops and presentations** – NRIS staff offer free workshops and presentations to teach the public, government employees, users groups, and natural resources professionals how to use its new website applications.
- **Conferences and meetings** – In an effort to interact with and outreach to a cross-section of Montanans, NRIS staff participate in conferences across the state. These opportunities have included meetings of the Montana Association of Counties, and the Montana Stockgrowers Association.
- **User feedback** – NRIS is committed to providing quality data services to our users. In order to effectively evaluate the types of use and interest in our information and web applications, NRIS conducts periodic surveys.
- **Newsletters** – NRIS contributes articles to industry newsletters and journals to inform Montana professionals about NRIS programs and services. The NRIS Natural Heritage Program produces its own newsletter, *Optimolocus*, to keep readers informed about new activities and projects.
- **GIS Day** – GIS Day is an annual international event that encourages geographic information systems (GIS) users to open their doors to the public. NRIS staff use GIS Day as a way to demonstrate the importance of geography in our everyday lives by conducting interactive presentations for students and adults.



Helena fifth grader Nicole Carkeek shows off the topographical map she created on her hand during an NRIS presentation on GIS Day.

Photo credit: George Lane/Helena Independent Record

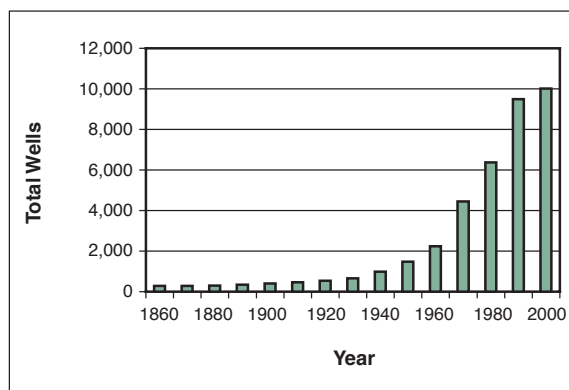


**Water  
Information  
System**

[nris.state.mt.us/wis](http://nris.state.mt.us/wis)

The Water Information System (WIS) provides a broad selection of information pertaining to Montana water resources. Montanans use the WIS in a variety of ways. For example: the WIS supports state officials in writing water quality plans, managing reservoirs and stream flow, and seeking drought aid; contractors can find well logs for areas where they plan to drill; land owners are able to view their water rights information to ensure that state records are up to date; and recreational users can find real-time flow data for rafting or detailed fisheries and stocking information for angling.

The WIS provides information on Montana's streams, lakes, wetlands, wells, and aquifers. In partnership with state, federal, and non-profit organizations, the WIS provides users' access to water rights, water quality, fisheries, water supply, well and well log, and wetland information. This information can be mapped and reported in a variety of ways, and combined with other data at NRIS to meet the analytic and mapping needs of our user community. The WIS also hosts and maintains the website for the Governor's Drought Monitoring Committee.



Cumulative number of wells along Highway 93 corridor in the Bitterroot Valley.

## Recent Accomplishments:

- Comprehensive drought monitoring web site for the state, drought maps, and climate data.
- Interactive web access to Department of Natural Resources and Conservation water rights information, including maps and reports.
- Web access to stream and lake data from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Fish distribution, stocking information.
- Web access to multi-agency information on locations of water quality data collection sites.
- Web access to the Bureau of Mines and Geology's extensive well database, well logs, and water quality data.